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Central Intelligence Agency

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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USSR-India-Pakistan: Moscow Plays Peacemaker

Summary

Pakistan's earlier fears that Moscow encouraged India to provoke the recent border crisis to extract Pakistani concessions on Afghanistan are unfounded. Moscow benefits from a certain level of tension between India and Pakistan, but it probably realizes that the perception of a Soviet hand in fanning this dispute would damage other Soviet initiatives, in particular its current tactics for luring Islamabad into an Afghan settlement.

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Soviet Handling of the Crisis

A Pakistani Foreign Ministry official told the US Embassy that his government credited the Soviets with having worked to avoid war during recent tensions on the Indo-Pakistani border. He indicated that Soviet officials and media--though their views were slanted towards the Indian

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version of events--were far more balanced than usual during disputes between India and Pakistan. [redacted] (b)(1) (b)(3)

Some Pakistanis had earlier speculated that Moscow had urged New Delhi to heighten tensions in order to increase pressure on Islamabad to soften its position on Afghanistan. [redacted] several factors: Soviet support for India in other disputes, especially the 1971 Bangladesh war; the current spate of Soviet/Afghan incursions on Pakistan's western border; and the visit of Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Natwar Singh to Moscow in late January [redacted] (b)(1) (b)(1) (b)(3)

Embassy New Delhi reports that an Indian politician unfriendly to the Soviets but with a wide range of contacts says that they urged restraint on both India and Pakistan, causing some resentment within India at Soviet "evenhandedness." The source claimed that the Soviets provided India with information on the position of Pakistani units to support their agrument that New Delhi was overreacting. He also stated that some Indian officials were disturbed that Moscow had not provided greater political support during the crisis and at the implication that the Soviets might have provided information on Indian troop positions to Islamabad. [redacted] (b)(3)

The Embassy further notes that Soviet diplomats in New Delhi were discreetly silent during the crisis. Soviet media coverage of the border tensions was not inflammatory, and a Pravda editorial of 6 February hinted that Moscow had played a part in defusing them. [redacted] (b)(3)

Moscow's Motives

Moscow does benefit from a certain level of tension between India and Pakistan and frequently tries to increase Indian suspicion on such issues as Pakistan's military buildup or alleged involvement with the Sikhs. The Soviets may well hope that one by-product of the latest crisis will be to nudge Pakistan toward concessions on Afghanistan. Moscow has in the past [redacted] mislead [redacted] its clients to intensify and exploit conflicts. It conceivably might have done so with India in the interest of increasing pressure on Pakistan--perhaps even precipitating the fall of the Zia regime and its replacement by one friendlier to the Soviets--or reinforcing waning Indian reliance on Moscow. [redacted] (b)(1) (b)(3)

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Moscow's reported position during this latest crisis is, however, consistent with General Secretary Gorbachev's failure during his visit to India last November to make a specific commitment to support India in its disputes with Pakistan--a development that occasioned some concern in New Delhi about Soviet intentions in the region. An Indo-Pakistani war, in fact, could be damaging to Soviet interests: it would disrupt relations with both the US and China, especially if the Soviets were drawn in on India's side; it could foster Pakistani unity at a time when Moscow is trying to promote divisions within Pakistan over support for the Afghan resistance; and it would undercut Moscow's efforts to improve its international standing by projecting itself as a peacemaker in regional disputes. [redacted] (b)(3)

The current Soviet effort to draw Islamabad into an Afghan settlement that insures continued Communist dominance in Kabul is characterized by protestations of flexibility and good intentions and by offers to provide economic aid and Soviet good offices with India should an agreement on Afghanistan be reached. Moscow has not yet given up on these initiatives and presumably would realize that any evidence of a Soviet hand in fanning tensions on the Indo-Pakistani border would run counter to these tactics. [redacted] (b)(3)

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